

# **520 Tolling Implementation Committee Final DRAFT Summary and Qualitative Assessment of Narrative Public Comments**

**June 12 – September 23, 2008**

## **Section 1: Introduction & Executive Summary**

In June 2008, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee was directed by the Washington State Legislature to examine tolling options for the 520 and I-90 corridors and to engage the public and local jurisdictions in providing input regarding specific tolling issues. After a first round of technical analysis, four tolling scenarios were introduced to the public through an interactive website and a series of six open houses held in various communities around Lake Washington. This report summarizes the key themes heard from the public in response to the initial tolling scenarios.

More than 2,770 people provided input into the process and it is worth considering a few caveats when reading this report. The first is that the people providing input are self-selected and thus interested in the topic. As such, this report is not representative of the public-at-large. Further, there were two organized letter-writing campaigns, which provided over 1,800 of the 2,770 comments received. One was from the Sierra Club, which resulted in nearly 1,000 comments and the other was from residents of Mercer Island, and resulted in more than 800 comments.

Of the more than 940 additional comments, over 300 were written and verbal comments received at the open houses and over 600 were comments received via the committee's website, email, or mailing addresses.

This summary is organized to help readers understand how those efforts may have shaped the common themes and findings. When possible, the report summarizes:

- All comments
- All comments not including letter-writing campaign comments or petition comments
- Comments received via open house comment forms and verbal comments

Overall, comments expressed support for the concept of tolling, although Mercer Island residents generally oppose tolling I-90. Of the others, less than fifteen percent oppose tolling. Many respondents are concerned that good decisions be made regarding how tolling is implemented, with key factors including diversion, transit service and traffic congestion. Respondents also advocated different route choices, possible toll exemptions, and other important details of implementing a tolling plan. Of the more than 200 open house comment form responses, a clear majority said to toll 520 in 2010, rather than 2016, and a similar majority said I-90 should also be tolled.

It is important to note that this final report reflects public input received and incorporated since the completion of the preliminary draft that was presented to the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee on September 11, 2008. Over 200 comments, including all verbal remarks received at the open houses, as well as additional written statements received via the project website, and

from the Sierra Club have been incorporated into this report. As such, comment data and percentage values have been adjusted to account for this additional feedback.

### *How does current public comment respond to the committee's evaluation criteria?*

Based on legislative direction, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee established five major criteria to use for evaluating tolling scenarios:

- How much revenue is generated (and when)
- The “reasonableness” of the toll
- The diversion effects of a bridge toll
- The performance of the bridge
- The impacts a toll may have on lower income bridge users

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee will use public comments, along with other input, to help evaluate tolling scenarios. The following describes how public comment received during this comment period responds to the five evaluation criteria.

#### *How much revenue is generated (and when)*

Public comments received so far show a general trend toward generating revenue sooner, rather than later, particularly if this results in lower toll rates for travelers. Many respondents stated their support for tolling as a funding source, and many specifically stated that tolling should begin in 2010, rather than waiting until 2016. Many members of the public are interested in generating revenue to fill the funding gap and in minimizing the cost to drivers. Mercer Islanders oppose tolling I-90 to pay for SR 520 improvements.

#### *The “reasonableness” of the toll*

Few respondents directly commented on the “reasonableness” of the toll. Some said they thought the toll rates provided in the scenarios were reasonable, while others said that toll rates of \$3 or more were too high, and requested toll rates in the \$0.50 to \$2 range. Among those that opposed tolling, most opposed any toll, while a few said the annual cost to their family would be too high given the proposed toll rates.

There is also a group of people who oppose tolling because they consider it similar to a tax, think that existing taxes should pay for 520, or say it isn't right to pay a toll on an existing bridge that has previously been paid for.

#### *The diversion effects of a bridge toll*

Many respondents and jurisdictions were concerned with the diversion effects of a bridge toll. People from the north and south communities were concerned about diversion around the lake, while eastside and some westside communities were concerned about diversion to neighborhoods streets as a result of segment tolling. Diversion and congestion concerns were present in comments from all geographical areas.

#### *The performance of the bridge*

While most respondents did not address bridge performance, those that discussed variable tolling were often interested in improved traffic and reduced congestion. Most respondents appear to understand the connection between variable tolling and improved traffic flow. Overall, the need for bridge replacement and concerns about connecting roadways were mentioned more often than bridge performance.

#### *The impacts a toll may have on lower income bridge users*

Many respondents were concerned with potential impacts to lower income bridge users. The majority were concerned about either their own, or another's, ability to pay a toll if using the bridge on a consistent basis. A minority of respondents suggest that low income bridge users be exempt from tolls, while more respondents said that particular tolls should not be implemented due to possible adverse effects on lower income residents. Many respondents suggested that increased transit options should be provided for those unable to pay the toll or that a free alternate route should always be available.

After considering the analysis of the initial scenarios and the public comments received, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee will conduct additional analysis and will seek public input on new scenarios later this fall.

## **Section 2: Legislative Direction and Committee Charge**

### *The Tolling Implementation Committee*

During the 2008 session, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 3096 to address financing the SR 520 bridge replacement project. This legislation also created the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee, with the following membership:

- Bob Drewel, Executive Director Puget Sound Regional Council
- Paula Hammond, Washington State Department of Transportation Secretary
- Dick Ford, Washington State Transportation Commission

This committee has been tasked with the following:

- Evaluate traffic diversion to other routes, including 522, and recommend mitigation
- Evaluate advanced tolling technology
- Evaluate new applications of emerging technology to better manage traffic
- Explore opportunities to partner with the business community to reduce congestion and contribute financially
- Confer with mayors and city councils
- Conduct public work sessions and open houses to solicit citizen views on tolling the existing 520 bridge, tolling both I-90 and 520, providing incentives for transit and carpooling, and implementing variable tolling
- Provide a report to the governor and legislature in January 2009

This comment summary is specifically focused on the legislature's direction to engage citizens on particular issues relating to tolling the 520 and I-90 bridges.

## Legislative mandate for public outreach

The Legislature provided specific direction to engage citizens on particular issues relating to tolling the 520 and I-90 bridges. The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee was tasked with engaging citizens on the following topics:

- Funding a portion of the 520 replacement project with tolls on the existing bridge
- Funding the 520 replacement project and improvements on the I-90 Bridge with a toll paid by drivers on both bridges
- Providing incentives and choices for transit and carpooling
- Implementation of variable tolling as a way to reduce congestion

The committee aimed to contact a large number of citizens to hear their questions and concerns about these issues, and to make it easy for citizens to provide their input. The committee provided a variety of ways for citizens to communicate with them, including open houses, mailed comment forms, email and phone contact information, and an interactive website. Sections below describe outreach completed during the summer of 2008.

## Section 3: Analysis of Public Comments

### *Outreach completed summer 2008*

#### Website

The committee launched a website, [www.build520.org](http://www.build520.org), as a portal for providing information to citizens and collecting citizen's input. The website includes information about the 520 bridge and the 520 bridge replacement project, traffic congestion on the 520 bridge, funding options, electronic tolling, variable tolling for congestion relief, and the tolling scenarios under consideration by the committee. The website also features announcements of upcoming committee meetings and open houses, an online comment form, contact information for the committee (mail, email, and phone), and a library of additional tolling information resources. This tool will continue to be used in future phases of analysis. During this period, more than 4,300 unique viewers visited the site.

#### Open Houses

The committee advertised and held six open houses in communities around Lake Washington to provide information on the four initial toll scenarios. Open houses were announced to the public with display advertisements in fourteen local newspapers in advance of each nearby open house. A postcard announcing open house dates was mailed to 15,000 residents from mailing lists related to the 520 bridge project. Postcards were also delivered to nine local community centers. An email announcement was provided to addresses on 520 and other related project mailing lists, and the open house dates were provided on the committee website.

The number of attendees and comment forms received at each open house are as follows:

*July 29*

UW Bothell North Creek Events Center

Attendees: 52

Comment forms: 23

*520 Tolling Implementation Committee*

*Assessment of Narrative Public Comments*

*June 12 – September 23, 2008*

Verbal comments: 7

*July 31*

Spirit of Washington Events Center (Renton)

Attendees: 18

Comment forms: 11

Verbal comments: 10

*August 5*

Naval Reserve at South Lake Union (Seattle)

Attendees: 60

Comment forms: 33

Verbal comments: 31

*August 6*

Bellevue City Hall

Attendees: 85

Comment forms: 47

Verbal comments: 35

*August 7*

Kirkland Performance Center

Attendees: 61

Comment forms: 37

Verbal comments: 32

*August 13*

Community Center at Mercer View (Mercer Island)

Attendees: 92

Comment forms: 51

Verbal comments: 30

***520 Project Open Houses***

The Committee also participated in two public open houses held by the 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project and 520 fairs and festivals events. The two open houses were held on:

- June 24, 2008
- June 25, 2008

***Committee Meetings***

The public was also invited to the Committee's work sessions, during which the tolling scenario analysis was discussed in greater depth. These meetings were held on:

- June 17, 2008
- July 10, 2008
- July 23, 2008
- August 12, 2008

### ***Jurisdictional Briefings***

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee and staff have presented information to more than 40 elected officials, jurisdictions, and stakeholder groups during the spring and summer of 2008. These included meetings with community and civic groups such as the Bellevue Downtown Association and Transportation Choices Coalition, along with many local city councils and elected representatives. Briefing sessions allowed committee staff members to answer questions about the tolling options under consideration and to record comments and concerns from a range of stakeholders.

### ***Press releases and press coverage***

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee was the subject of more than 25 newspaper, radio, or television pieces and several blog postings during the summer of 2008. Newspaper coverage included articles in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Seattle Times*, *Redmond Reporter*, *Mercer Island Reporter* and many other local papers. Several television and radio news outlets, including *King 5* and *KOMO*, announced the open houses and explained the committee's tasks to their audiences. News coverage discussing the committee is posted on the website at [www.build520.org/tolling\\_news.htm](http://www.build520.org/tolling_news.htm).

### ***Comment Totals and Sources – By the Numbers***

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee received 2778 comments during the summer of 2008. A general breakdown of comment sources were as follows:

- Via email or website: 797
- Via open house comment forms or verbal comments: 344
- Via standard mail: 1,636
- Via phone: 1

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee also received letters with comments from the following local jurisdictions, agencies, and groups:

- City of Bellevue
- City of Kirkland
- City of Mercer Island
- City of Lake Forest Park, Kenmore, Woodinville and King County Councilmember Bob Ferguson
- City of Renton
- City of Seattle
- Washington State Treasurer
- City of Newcastle
- Washington State Human Rights Commission
- King County Transit Advisory Committee
- City of Clyde Hill
- City of Medina

- Town of Hunts Point
- Town of Yarrow Point
- AAA Washington
- Bellevue Chamber of Commerce
- No Toll on I-90
- Municipal League of King County
- King County Department of Transportation
- City of Redmond
- Town of Beaux Arts Village

### ***Comments from local jurisdictions***

The committee received formal letters or statements from many local jurisdictions outlining their concerns and priorities for any future tolling option on the 520 bridge. A brief summary of the key points from each jurisdiction is provided below. The complete text of each letter can be found on the committee's website at [www.build520.org](http://www.build520.org) or in the attached appendix. Further comments from many jurisdictions are expected in the future.

#### *City of Bellevue*

The City supports tolling 520 in 2010, provided that early tolling results in earlier completion of the project and/or lower toll rates. The City does not support tolling I-90, unless tolling only 520 results in unacceptable levels of traffic diversion or high toll rates, in which case the City supports the concept of tolling I-90 as well. The City opposes segment tolling and feels that tolling revenue should only go to pay for capital construction on the 520 and I-90 bridges.

#### *City of Kirkland*

The City generally supports highway tolling and pricing.

#### *City of Mercer Island*

The City expects the previous agreements from the Memorandum of Agreement regarding I-90 to be maintained and is prepared to be highly involved in future decision-making processes. They recommend using revenue from tolls on 520 or I-90 only for construction, maintenance, improvement and mitigation within those corridors. The City expects 520 tolling prior to construction, with the lowest possible toll to avoid diversion to I-90.

#### *City of Lake Forest Park, Kenmore, Woodinville and King County Councilmember*

##### *Bob Ferguson*

These cities expressed concerns about the reliability of the diversion data for the 522 and I-405 corridors and recommend further analysis to examine diversion to 522 if both bridges are tolled. Additional analysis should include examining peak periods, changing demographics, and diversion assumptions. They also suggest possible mitigation measures to address diversion, including improved transit service, park-and-ride facilities, transit capacity, and capacity on 522 and other local routes.

*City of Renton*

The City expressed concerns about diversion to I-405 and emphasized the need to complete I-405 improvements in a timely manner. The City requests that any recommendation from the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee include the completion of the ready-to-go and funded I-405 Stage 2 improvements.

*City of Seattle*

The City supports tolling 520 to fund the new 520 bridge. The City also supports implementing variable tolling to help make traffic along 520 more predictable and efficient. The City is only in favor of tolling cross lake trips and does not support any segment tolls on 520. They also recommend a share of toll revenues be used to support operation and maintenance needs on 520 and recommend the tolling plan for 520 emphasize throughput of people and goods, rather than vehicle volumes, in order to lower vehicles miles traveled in the region. The City also supports a regional approach to tolling and encourages the committee to evaluate tolls on both 520 and I-90 in 2010.

*Washington State Treasurer*

The State Treasurer recommends tolling 520 prior to construction, tolling both the 520 and I-90 bridges, and obtaining an investment grade toll study to determine a proposed tolling plan's ability to withstand economic volatility. Tolling 520 prior to construction avoids paying "interest on interest" and reduces risk to the state. Tolling both bridges increase revenue stability and decreases risk of revenue delays.

*City of Newcastle*

The City recommends against using a tolling scenario that would be expected to generate excess funds and suggests finding a tolling scenario that funds the 520 bridge with the least cost to residents and over the shortest possible time frame. They also advocate that preventing traffic congestion on both bridges be a key consideration when deciding whether to toll one or both bridge facilities.

*Washington State Human Rights Commission*

This commission is concerned about the equity of tolling for low income travelers. They suggest that the potentially economically regressive effects of tolling on low income people be considered before implementing any tolling option. Their concerns include whether previous studies of impacts to low income travelers truly address those with incomes under \$40,000 per year, and whether proposed mitigation solutions for tolling are real and practical solutions.

*King County Transit Advisory Committee*

This committee supports tolling to fund the 520 bridge, and starting tolls on both 520 and I-90 in 2010. They recommend using variable tolling and devoting some toll revenue to fund improved transit service that can offer a travel alternative. They also recommend tolling in 2010 to support the acquisition of 45 new buses using federal dollars.

*Cities of Clyde Hill, Medina, Yarrow Point, & Hunts Point*

These cities each recommend that the SR 520 and I-90 floating bridges be considered integrated facilities for tolling purposes, with tolling of both corridors beginning as early as 2010. They



only support tolling on the floating-bridge portion of each corridor, and do not support any segment tolling. Additional recommendations include using revenue from tolling exclusively for construction, operation, maintenance or mitigation purposes related to 520 and I-90. These cities do not support using toll revenues for transit.

#### *Town of Beaux Arts Village*

The Town Village recommends that the SR 520 and I-90 floating bridges be considered integrated facilities for tolling purposes, with tolling of both corridors beginning as early as 2010. The Town only supports tolling on the floating-bridge portion of each corridor, and does not support any segment tolling. Additional recommendations include using revenue from tolling exclusively for construction, operation, maintenance or mitigation purposes related to 520 and I-90. The town does not support using toll revenues for transit.

#### *King County Department of Transportation*

The Department supports implementing variable tolling on the 520 and I-90 bridges in 2010. The Department support using tolling revenue to support enhanced transit across Lake Washington.

#### *City of Redmond*

The City supports the evaluation of variable tolling on the 520 and I-90 bridges in 2010. The City urges continued analysis to determine the effects of tolling on low income drivers and local businesses and to identify ways to mitigate these impacts. The City only supports using tolling revenue to help fund the cost of the new 520 bridge, and to pay for capital and maintenance expenses in the cross-lake corridor.

### ***Geographic representation of public comments***

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee received public comments from residents throughout the region. Including all comments recorded, public comments were received from residents of the following areas:

- North end (5%)
- West side (26%)
- South end (3%)
- Eastside (16%)
- Mercer Island (42%)
- Other/Unknown (8%)

In addition, respondents of the comment forms received were asked to report the zip code in which they live and the zip code where they work. The responses to those questions are as follows:

What is your home zip code? (187 responses)

- North end (13%)
- West side (26%)
- South end (6%)
- Eastside (33%)
- Mercer Island (22%)

If you work outside the home, what is your work zip code? (92 responses)

- North end (9%)
- West side (58%)
- South end (7%)
- Eastside (27%)
- Mercer Island (0%)

### ***Key themes by region***

While there were many similarities in responses from around the region, comments showed some notable geographical differences. The following broadly describes the issues and concerns from written comments that appeared unique or more strongly represented in regional areas.

#### **North end**

This area includes comments from respondents in Bothell, Kenmore, Woodinville and other north end cities. North end respondents were somewhat more likely to mention diversion and traffic congestion, environmental issues, or to favor tolling or tolling both bridges. Around half of respondents from the north end mentioned each of those issues.

#### **West side**

The west side includes comments from the City of Seattle. Respondents from this area were more likely than other respondents to be concerned about traffic congestion and diversion, with almost three-quarters of respondents mentioning those issues. They were also more likely to be concerned about climate change and environmental issues, with more than half of respondents mentioning those issues. Seattle residents were also more likely to favor tolling, and to request a toll on both the I-90 and 520 bridges.

#### **South end**

This includes the cities of Renton, Newcastle, Burien, and cities south of those areas. South end respondents were somewhat less likely than others to mention traffic congestion and environmental issues, and were less likely to be in favor of tolling.

#### **Eastside**

Eastside respondents include those from Kirkland, Redmond, Bellevue, and cities to the east of those areas. Comments from the eastside were somewhat less likely to favor tolling both bridges, and more likely to discuss variable tolling as a possible tolling method.

#### **Mercer Island**

The majority of Mercer Island respondents advocated that the I-90 memorandum of agreement be met. They oppose tolling on I-90. They were also more likely to mention geographic equity, cost of living, social justice issues, taxes, and diversion to I-90.

### ***Overarching Key Themes: Open-ended/Narrative comments***

The following themes are representative of the 2,651 comments received during this time period. All comments were carefully read and categorized according to their content, and the ten most

commonly identified themes are listed below, along with brief descriptions of the types of comments represented in each category.

As previously discussed, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee received more than 800 preprinted postcards from members of the Sierra Club. The preprinted postcard message was categorized as representing the following key themes:

- Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion
- Generally favors tolling
- Favors tolling both bridges
- Variable tolling
- Environmental impacts & climate change

Each of these postcards was recorded carefully, including any handwritten messages included with the preprinted text.

In addition, the Committee received a petition with more than 800 signatures from Mercer Island residents. The petition message was categorized as representing the following key themes:

- Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion
- Tax burden
- Opposes tolling I-90
- Concerned about social justice/fairness
- Concerned about geographic equity/fairness
- 520 bridge financing
- Mercer Island dependence on I-90
- I-90 memorandum of agreement

The following section highlights common themes from the input. Four different tables of “top ten themes” are provided to illustrate the input by source, and in total, so that readers can see how results vary with and without the letters and petitions included. Please note that comments were assigned to multiple categories if appropriate.

*Table 1: Most Common Themes – Excludes Preprinted Postcards & Petitions*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Percent of Comments*</b>
Generally favors tolling	21%
Process & decision-making	21%
Supports increased transit service	21%
Timing of tolling implementation	17%
Exemptions for Mercer Island residents	15%
Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion	14%
Generally opposes tolling	13%
Tax burden	13%
Favors tolling both bridges	12%
Opposes tolling I-90	12%

\*Percentage of nearly 950 comments, including

handwritten notes on preprinted postcards

*Table 2: Most Common Themes – Includes All Comments*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Percent of Comments**</b>
Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion	73%
Generally favors tolling	45%
Favors tolling both bridges	42%
Variable tolling	41%
Environmental impacts & climate change	39%
Tax burden	35%
Opposes tolling I-90	34%
Concerned about social justice/fairness	34%
Concerned about geographic equity/fairness	33%
520 bridge financing	33%

\*\*Percentage of more than 2770 comments, including all text received

*Table 3: Most Common Themes – Excluding Only Mercer Island Petition*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Percent of Comments***</b>
Generally favors tolling	64%
Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion	61%
Favors tolling both bridges	60%
Variable tolling	59%
Environmental impacts & climate change	56%
Process & decision-making	10%
Supports increased transit service	10%
Timing of tolling implementation	8%
Exemptions for Mercer Island residents	7%
Generally opposes tolling	6%

\*\*\*Percentage of more than 1900 comments, excluding only MI petition

*Table 4: Most Common Themes – Excluding Only Sierra Club comments*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Percent of Comments****</b>
Concerned with diversion & traffic	55%

Themes	Percent of Comments****
congestion	
Tax burden	54%
Opposes tolling I-90	54%
Concerned about social justice/fairness	53%
Concerned about geographic equity/fairness	51%
520 bridge financing	51%
Mercer Island dependence on I-90	49%
I-90 memorandum of agreement	47%
Generally favors tolling	11%
Process & decision-making	11%

\*\*\*\*Percentage of more than 1780 comments, excluding only SC comments

## *Characterization of Common Themes in Public Comment*

### **Generally favors tolling**

Respondents characterized with this theme indicated they were in favor of the idea of tolling to fund the 520 bridge and improve the flow of traffic. These respondents have different opinions about which routes should be tolled, when, and under what circumstances, but they generally agree that tolling is a good next step for our region.

*I believe tolls are the right way to fund the balance of the cost of the new SR-520 bridge.*

*After experiencing the Tacoma Narrows and SR167 "Good to Go" card-pay no-stop system, I'd say that would be the way to go, and soon, to start collecting tolls on 520 to help pay for it.*

### **Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion**

Comments identified concerns about diversion to other major roadways, such as I-90 and 522, as well as traffic congestion in neighborhoods. The majority were concerned that tolling would adversely impact their travel along alternate routes. Some respondents also expressed general concerns about traffic congestion in the region, or did not think tolling would improve congestion.

*I-5 and I-405 are already congested. The tolling plans will worsen this traffic.*

*When tolling is implemented on SR 520, it will impact traffic on SR522.*

### **Supports increased transit service**

Many respondents were also interested in increased transit service. These respondents often said that increased transit service would be a necessary complement to tolling on 520. Others expressed general support for transit service, including both bus and rail service on 520, I-90, and throughout the region. Some respondents advocated using toll revenue to fund transit

improvements. A smaller set of respondents indicated specifically that they were opposed to funding transit with toll revenue, while most comments that referenced transit indicated support for alternatives to paying a toll.

*Using tolls to invest in transit will benefit disadvantaged communities and is an absolute must for these projects.*

*I support tolls on the 520 and I-90 bridge and I support mass transit and bike lanes.*

### **Favors tolling both bridges**

Comments expressed a straightforward preference that both the 520 and I-90 bridges be tolled. Many of these comments said tolling should begin on the two bridges at the same time and early. A subset of these respondents expressed concern about diversion effects or concerns that revenues would be lower if only the 520 bridge is tolled.

*We all paid for the I90 bridge to be rebuilt, we all should pay for the 520 to be expanded. I am for both bridges to be tolled.*

*Both bridges must be tolled if you want to avoid diversion.*

### **Process & decision-making**

Many respondents were interested in or concerned about how tolling decisions are being made. These comments often mentioned the State of Washington, state legislature, or the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee. Some comments more generally discussed leadership or project delivery.

*I do not even travel on the bridges, but I am disappointed in our leadership to resort to something like this.*

*It should be embarrassing to our politicians to force their constituents to fork out more money after collecting so much in taxes already.*

### **Timing of tolling implementation**

These comments mostly discussed the timing of tolling implementation. The majority of these comments suggested that tolling begin “right away” or “as soon as possible.” Some comments were questions about when tolling will begin, and some were opposed to tolling before the new 520 bridge has been constructed.

*I say do the tolls and do them as early as possible to begin to pay for the bridge replacement.*

*Please do not toll in advance. Everyone knows the state wants as much money as possible, but I really do not feel comfortable paying before a bridge has been built.*

### **Variable tolling**

Some respondents addressed variable tolling, either expressing their preference for this idea, or their opposition. When excluding form letter comments, there were a roughly equal number of comments that supported variable tolling plans and that opposed variable tolling. Among those that supported variable tolling, it was often seen as a method of easing traffic congestion or collecting needed funding.

*Even though I am a daily 520 user (even on the weekends) I think the toll should be every day of the week, but should be less expensive on the weekends.*

*Changing the toll depending on the time of day is ridiculous. Then not only would one have to pay, but they'd have to wonder how much until they actually got to the toll plaza.*

### **Exemptions for Mercer Island residents**

A specific set of respondents said that there should not be a toll for travel to or from Mercer Island. Of these, many advocated not tolling I-90 at all, while others requested an exemption for Mercer Island travel or Mercer Island residents. Most comments expressed that Mercer Island is a unique situation with no alternative route available.

*Tolls on the federally funded I-90 to pay for SR-520 will punish Mercer Island residents disproportionately.*

*Mercer Island residents use the I-90 as our only way to get to and from home. I do not think Mercer Island residents should have to pay any toll.*

### **Generally opposes tolling**

These comments expressed overall opposition to tolling. Some saw tolling as a “tax” and others saw it as a “double tax” – they say the state either does or should have other funding methods for transportation projects. Some respondents felt that tolling was not affordable, either for themselves or for other drivers.

*I am very concerned about this. I drive the bridge everyday and most of the tolls being put forward would price me off the bridge. A \$7 toll is \$1750 a year!*

*Please don't toll any existing bridge. We already pay taxes for transportation and plenty of them!*

### **Tax burden**

Most of these respondents said that taxes in this region are already high, and were opposed to tolling. Many suggested that existing tax revenues should be used to fund transportation improvements.

*Why does state government relentlessly try to tax us more and more? We have the highest gas tax in the country and some of the worst traffic.*

*I am outraged that we should be asked to pay a toll to drive on the public roads (and these are public roads) when we already pay gasoline taxes, car tab and car registration taxes, sales taxes and property taxes that are supposed to pay for this sort of infrastructure.*

### **Environmental impacts & climate change**

The majority of these comments were in favor of tolling as a method of reducing emissions from motor vehicles and encouraging alternative modes of transportation. Others were concerned about water quality pollution and other types of pollution caused by cars.

*I support the tolls being used to promote alternative modes of travel, such as carpooling, biking, and transit.*

*Use part of the tolls to pay for transit service, to reduce congestion, noise, and greenhouse gas emissions.*

### **Opposes tolling I-90**

The majority of these comments oppose a toll on the I-90 bridge. Some opposed a toll on I-90 as a way to fund improvements to a different corridor, while others said it was important to have a non-tolled alternative route across Lake Washington, and others felt it would hurt Mercer Island residents.

*I am strongly against on a toll for the I-90 bridge to support the 520 bridge.*

*Please leave the I-90 alone. It is crucial to have a higher speed east/west access with no toll.*

### **Concerned about social justice/fairness**

These respondents were concerned about all citizens' ability to pay the toll. Many asked how the Committee is considering the needs of low income residents, while others were opposed to tolling because it would place an undue burden on low income residents. Many of these comments were concerned about the ability of fixed-income Mercer Island residents to pay for a toll on I-90 bridge, though some were concerned about residents from other areas. A few requested exemption for low income travelers.

*There are many people living on the Island who can not afford to pay a toll to drive into Seattle and to get to I-5.*

*I am concerned about the future tolls on SR 520 bridge. Have you taken into consideration the income levels and needs of folks using the bridge? Not everyone works at Microsoft. Students going to U.W. are often barely making ends meet.*

### **Concerned about geographic equity/fairness**

The majority of these comments were Mercer Island residents concerned about paying more than their fair share of the tolls to fund a new 520 bridge they would not use. A few comments expressed concerns about the fairness of impacts to their neighborhoods.



*Tolling I-90 to pay for a new SR 520 bridge would place a disproportionate share of the costs on Mercer Island residents.*

*Tolling both I-90 and 520 will create tremendous financial duress for families living on the eastside. Not all residents living on the eastside are affluent!*

### **520 bridge financing**

The majority of these comments expressed concerns that drivers on I-90 would be paying for improvements on another facility. These respondents said that tolling I-90 drivers is not an appropriate way to finance construction of the 520 bridge. Some respondents said tolling was an appropriate way to fund the 520 bridge, and expressed support for user fees. Others said 520 should not be paid for using toll revenue.

*It would be unfair to tax the users of I-90 to pay for a new SR 520 bridge.*

*520 is not an interstate, however it does benefit the entire state, so why are you so 'gun-ho' to start tolling? Why don't you get state funding for this project, just as you did for the I-90 bridge?*

### **Mercer Island dependence on I-90**

These comments emphasized Mercer Island residents' dependence on I-90 for their travel needs. Many comments expressed that Mercer Island is a unique situation with no alternative route available.

*Mercer Island residents, teachers, and school personnel or business employees who work on the island must use I-90 many more times a day.*

*Mercer Island residents don't have a choice about rerouting and avoiding tolls, we live here and use the bridge for basic services.*

### **I-90 memorandum of agreement**

These comments from the Mercer Island petition describe the intent of the memorandum of agreement for I-90, as a supporting reason why I-90 should not be tolled.

*It was the intent of the memorandum of agreement that concurrence of the parties be a prerequisite to action that would result in a major change in either the operation or the capacity of the I-90 facility.*

### **Open House Comments: Responses to specific questions**

The following describes overall responses from 202 open house comments forms, received either during or after the open houses. On the comment forms, respondents were asked their opinion about when to toll 520, whether to toll I-90, and how their travel behaviors might change due to tolling. A majority of these respondents recommend that 520 be tolled beginning in 2010, and a similar majority recommended tolling the I-90 bridge as well. When asked how their travel behavior would respond to a toll on the 520 bridge, many respondents said they would pay the toll, and many said they would take transit (See Table 7). A smaller number said they would take

a different route using I-90, or change their travel time to a time when the toll is lower. A still smaller number indicated they would carpool or vanpool when they would normally drive alone, not make the trip, make the trip but not cross the lake, or take a different route using 522 or I-5 and I-405. Please note that most of these respondents attended an open house, where they heard discussion, a presentation, and had questions answered by technical staff.

*Table 5: Do you think 520 should be tolled starting in 2010 or in 2016?*

<b>Toll 520 in 2010 or 2016?</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
2010	78%
2016	15%
Undecided	7%

*Table 6: Do you think the I-90 Bridge should also be tolled?*

<b>Toll I-90?</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Yes	70%
No	24%
Undecided	6%

*Table 7: When a toll is charged to use 520, what is the ONE thing you are most likely to do for your trips on 520?*

<b>Alternative Selected</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Pay the toll	34%
Take transit	25%
Change travel time to a period when the toll is lower	10%
Carpool/Vanpool when you would have driven alone	2%
Not make the trip	5%
Make the trip, but don't cross the lake	3%
Use I-90	2%
Use 522	12%
Use I-5 to I-405 or I-405 to I-5	5%
Take a different route (did not specify)	3%

Respondents using open house comment forms were also asked about their normal travel behavior, including how often in the previous week they had used the 520 bridge and I-90 bridge. The majority had not used the 520 bridge at all during the previous week, while a smaller majority had not used the I-90 bridge at all in the previous week.

*Table 8: How many days in the last week did you use the 520 bridge? The I-90 bridge?*

<b>Self-Reported Bridge Use</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>I-90</b>
0 days in the last week	54%	41%
1 days in the last week	11%	18%
2 days in the last week	9%	10%

<b>Self-Reported Bridge Use</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>I-90</b>
3 days in the last week	7%	7%
4 days in the last week	5%	4%
5 days in the last week	9%	3%
6 days in the last week	5%	4%
7 days in the last week	1%	13%

Respondents were also asked what additional tolling scenarios the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee should consider for future analysis. The following were suggestions from the open house comment forms. The most popular suggestion was to test tolling both 520 and I-90 in 2010 and many respondents specifically requested this new tolling scenario. Several respondents also suggested an exemption for drivers traveling to or from Mercer Island, rather than across the entire lake. Another group suggested that specific additional roads should also be tolled, such as 99, 522, I-5 or I-405, or suggested “tolling all the roads” or “system-wide tolling.” Others suggested tolling options included not having any tolls, using toll revenue for transit service, having a low-income toll exemption, perpetual tolling to fund future projects, or a toll based on vehicle weight or economy. Although mentioned by jurisdictions and organizations, mention of flat rate tolls was not prevalent in these comments.

*Table 9: Are there additional tolling scenarios that the committee should consider?*

<b>Additional Tolling Scenario</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Toll 520 & I-90 in 2010	31
Reduce toll on I-90 for Mercer Island	23
System-wide tolling	21
No tolls	10
Use toll revenue for transit	8
Low-income exemptions	3
Perpetual tolling to fund future projects	3
Toll based on vehicle weight or economy	2

### ***Drilling Down: Key distinctions between more and less frequent users of the 520 and I-90 bridges***

The large majority the 202 comment form respondents recommend starting tolls on 520 in 2010 and tolling I-90 as well as 520, and the majority of respondents also reported not using the 520 bridge in the week prior to responding to the comment form. Although it is possible that more frequent users of the bridge might be more likely to support or oppose tolling, this small sample did not appear to show a strong relationship between favoring tolling and bridge use.

*Table 10: Bridge Use & Tolling Preferences*

<b>Self-Reported Bridge Use</b>	<b>Toll in 2010</b>	<b>Toll in 2016</b>	<b>Yes, Toll I-90</b>	<b>No, Don't Toll I-90</b>
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<b>Self-Reported Bridge Use</b>	<b>Toll in 2010</b>	<b>Toll in 2016</b>	<b>Yes, Toll I-90</b>	<b>No, Don't Toll I-90</b>
0 days in the last week	85%	15%	85%	15%
1 day in the last week	89%	11%	97%	3%
2 days in the last week	75%	25%	75%	25%
3 days in the last week	90%	10%	85%	15%
4 days in the last week	75%	25%	100%	0%
5 days in the last week	79%	21%	60%	40%
6 days in the last week	100%	0%	100%	0%
7 days in the last week	0%	100%	67%	3%
Total	84%	16%	84%	16%

### ***Open House Comments: Verbal comments***

Over 140 verbal comments were submitted at the six public open houses. The nature of these comments are briefly summarized below:

#### **Bothell**

Comments expressed concern regarding diversion to SR 522 and associated mitigation.

#### **Renton**

Comments questioned how long tolls would be in place, and expressed concern over diversion to I-405 and local arterials.

#### **Seattle**

Comments expressed support for tolling both bridges in 2010 and for using tolling revenue to provide enhanced transit service.

#### **Bellevue**

Comments express concern over the cost of a toll and over the possible effects on cross-lake travel and mobility.

#### **Kirkland**

Comments questioned how tolling would work, specifically with regard to exemptions, and electronic tolling. A number of comments also discussed potential mitigation.

#### **Mercer Island**

Comments overwhelmingly opposed tolling I-90, and were in support of exemptions for Mercer Island residents.

## **Section 5: Anticipated Future Outreach**

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee will be examining additional scenarios and gathering additional public comment to guide their recommendations to the legislature in 2009.

Some of the committee's evaluation criteria could benefit from additional specific guidance from the public. The "reasonableness" of the toll and the performance of the bridge were addressed by very few respondents to this first request for public input. In addition, further work on the impacts of tolling on low-income residents would be beneficial, since a relatively small number of respondents addressed those issues.

Recommendations for future outreach methods include additional web-based outreach and briefings with community organizations to gain insight into their concerns and requests. The six open houses accounted for just more than 300 of the more than 2600 received by the committee. A web-based survey planned for the fall of 2008 will also help gather a broad range of comments and may help address more specific questions, such as appropriate toll rates.